

THE QUARTERBREED

a Story of an Army Officer on an Indian Reservation
By ROBERT AMES BENNET

It was told in the first installment of this story how Capt. Floyd Hardy, U. S. A., just back in the States from the Philippines where he had put down a savage uprising of Moros, arrives at Lakota Indian reservation in the Northwest. He finds a party of angry Indians firing on three white persons who have sought shelter in the canon. The whites are old Jake Dupont, a trader, his beautiful daughter, Marie, and a young Easterner named Vandervyn. They are ill-mannered toward Captain Hardy, but he risks his life and routs the Indians. He becomes friendly with the whites and learns that Vandervyn, nephew of a United States senator, had expected to get the agency appointment, following the killing of Nogen, the regular agent, by an Indian. Also, he discovers that Marie is a great granddaughter of Chief Sitting Bull, and that she has been educated in a French-Canadian convent. This installment contains some revelations of conditions on the reservation.

CHAPTER III. Confidences.

The rescuers from the agency had reined in their sweating ponies to a lope when they first caught sight of the party on the butte side of the canon. They struggled down the gulley at a walk, eight short-haired Indian policemen in blue uniform, and a tall, loose-lipped young halfbreed in ordinary frontier clothes. As they stopped in the stream to water their ponies, each furtively studied the rider who was approaching on the big, rangy mare.

"You're too late, Charlie," called Vandervyn. "Captain Hardy climbed the butte, and the whole bunch hit out."

"Soldiers?" queried the halfbreed.

"No, he's alone—our new agent," explained Vandervyn as his pony brought him alongside Hardy at the edge of the stream. "Captain, this is Charlie Redbear, our issue clerk and interpreter."

"Interpreter?" repeated Hardy. "Redbear is any of the police understand English?"

"No, sir, only a few words," mumbled the halfbreed.

"Tell them I am a captain of the horse soldiers—the Longhorns, I have been sent here to be the agent."

Redbear interpreted his words with swift signs. The swarthy policemen granted approvingly, and their leader rolled out a sonorous reply: "The halfbreed interpreted mechanically. He says your eye is straight. He says they are ready to trail and fight the Indians whose hearts are bad."

"They are not to pursue the party," ordered Hardy. "I shall call a council of the chiefs, and ascertain the cause of the tribal unrest. Tell them."

Redbear hesitated, and looked uncertainly at Vandervyn. The chief spoke to him in sharp reproof: "Do as you're told, Charlie. Captain Hardy is now in command of the reservation."

The halfbreed stared in astonishment, but hesitated to interpret. At once the faces of the policemen became sullen. They cast covert glances at Vandervyn. Without seeming to notice their sudden change of manner, Hardy selected four to act as escort to the Indian trader and his daughter. The rest of the party followed him back up the gulley.

From the first the mare walked out in the lead. She would soon have left behind, even Vandervyn's quick-stepping pinto had not her rider happened to glance about and catch the troubled expression on the younger man's face. Hardy waited for him to come alongside and gravely remarked: "I wish to express my regret, Mr. Vandervyn, that my detail here has deprived you of your expected promotion."

Vandervyn's small mouth curved with a cynical smile, but softened to a more agreeable expression as he met the other's gaze. "You admit it?" he muttered.

"Having accepted the detail, I cannot now ask to be relieved," said Hardy. "But the extra pay was not one of the inducements. Permit me to suggest that arrangements can be made to divert to your salary the amount in excess of my regular compensation as an officer."

The offer was as unexpected as it was generous. Vandervyn flushed, bit his lip, and replied half inaudibly: "You needn't think just because—No, that's not quite—You may mean well, but that's no excuse—"

"My fault, sir. Pardon me," apologized Hardy.

Vandervyn looked ahead at the mountains, considered, and turned to his companion with what seemed a cordial smile. "I am not used to being patronized, captain; but as you did not mean it that way—"

"Not at all."

Vandervyn nodded. "You now understand that I'm not one of the common run of Indian service employees. I was slated for attaché to our embassy at the Court of Saint James—celebrated the coming event with some friends, and wound up by heaving a brick through a window of the White House. Uncle shipped me out here until the storm should blow over."

Hardy may have recalled the bazins in which he had shared at West Point. His only comment was: "You were fortunate to get any appointment."

"Oh, I don't know," carelessly replied Vandervyn. "I didn't wake the president, and I had some of my wad left. The watchman sent me home in a taxi. But the infernal grafter must have

peached. I got this instead of London."

"Best thing for you?"

"You think so?" said Vandervyn, his wide-open eyelids drooping. "I've been six months in this God-forsaken jump-off place. I wouldn't have stayed six days if it hadn't been for Marie."

"Miss Dupont seems to be a very spirited young woman," dryly commented Hardy.

"Wait till you see her put on dog. She was three or four years at a convent in Ottawa. They must have farmed her out as a parlor-maid in some select British family. She can give a perfect imitation of a real lady—when she chooses."

"Yes?" said Hardy.

"You'd take it for the syre-nuff article," went on Vandervyn. "And that's not all. She can cook like an angel. Says she took a course in domestic science. But it must be hereditary. I'll give odds, one of her paternal ancestors was a French chef. French that's the word. The way she has with it! Even this halfbreed Redbear thinks he is in the running. Nogen was mad over her. He even would have married her. But he was not a man of family or culture. Fancy Jake Dupont



"I'm Not Used to Being Patronized, Captain."

for a father-in-law! Only thing, his squaw died five or six years ago. That was when he sent the girl to Ottawa."

Hardy looked at the mountains and changed the subject: "May I ask you to give the particulars of the killing of Mr. Nogen?"

Vandervyn's eyelids drooped low and opened again in a wide, guileless stare. "There's little to tell. Nogen and I and Redbear were riding into the mountains. We met the murderer. He and Nogen quarreled. He shot Nogen—killed him. Then Redbear and I fired, and one of us got him—we don't know which of us it was. That's all. You'll find it in the coroner's report. I kept a copy in the office at the agency."

"Strange that an Indian should attack a white man that way," observed Hardy. "Was the cause ascertained?"

Vandervyn twisted the tip of his blond mustache. "Well, it may be all talk, but I gather that the trouble was over this ore-buying. Nogen thought it a good thing to encourage. The chiefs felt ugly because the goods were not paid to them instead of to the laborers—the bucks and squaws who dug the ore, you know. The chiefs stirred up a lot of bad blood. No doubt they instigated the murder. They want to boss the tribe their own way."

"Let us trust that we shall have them in hand before fall."

"Fall?" echoed Vandervyn. "You expect to stay all summer? That shuts me out of my promotion."

"You may receive the appointment of attaché."

"Perhaps I don't want it just now. You forget Marie."

The gravity of the officer's face hardened to sternness. "Mr. Vandervyn, kindly bear in mind that, as agent of this reservation, I am in charge of the moral as well as the material welfare of every member of the tribe."

Vandervyn quivered like a thoroughbred flecked with the lash. His voice shook with passion:

"Damn your impudence! I'll have you understand you're not talking to one of your rough-neck recruits. My ancestors were gentlemen before yours were ever heard of."

"I regret that you do not seem to

have inherited their gentlemanly manners," came back the cool rejoinder.

Vandervyn's reddened face went crimson. The veins of his forehead began to swell. But with a strong effort he repressed his anger and forced a smile. "You want me one better, Hardy, I throw down."

The officer responded with instant sympathy:

"I see no reason why we should not become friends and work together for the good of the tribe."

"It's a go," agreed Vandervyn, and as if cleared of all ill temper by his outburst, he began a lively conversation on official society in the national capital.

The party topped the rise between the river and Sioux creek, and rode down the winding road that skirted its willow-fringed bank to the crossing of the stream. As they rounded the spur ridge on the far side, Redbear rode up on Hardy's right, and pointed to a small cabin among the quaking aspens in the mile-wide curve of the stream to the left.

"See my house, sir," he said.

"Looks well built," remarked Hardy. His fieldglasses at his eyes. "Quite new, I see. You have still to put dirt on this corner of the roof."

"And to put a squaw inside," added Vandervyn.

The halfbreed's jaw muscles twitched, but he did not look away from Hardy. "I got a letter from my sister Omma. She says she can't stay at school. She says she will die if they make her stay at school. I want her to come and cook for me till I get married."

"How old is she?"

"More than seventeen. She is sick to come. She says she will die."

"Very well. But you must take good care of her until she is married."

"Yes, sir. I've got a lot of money," replied the halfbreed, with the proneness of a weak nature to boast. "I've got almost—"

"Almost enough to buy you two squaws," cut in Vandervyn.

Redbear started to speak, caught the other's eye, and reined in his pony. Hardy did not notice this. They had rounded the toe of the spur ridge, and he was gazing up the green valley that lay outstretched in a circle of hills larger and far more picturesque than the Catalinas. Sioux creek swirled out of a canyon at the far end, to meander down a winding channel fringed with bushes and aspens and other small trees.

On a natural terrace, or "bench," two miles up, the glasses showed the log buildings at the agency. Midway down to Redbear's cabin lay across the creek was a large post-and-rail corral. Vandervyn had remained with rest his talk about the social graces of which he had been deprived for half a year. Hardy said little, but his eye was busy taking in the natural features of the beautiful valley.

When they came to the slope of the bench, or terrace, Vandervyn noticed the intent look of his companion, and inquired: "Well, what do you think of it? Talk about Siberian exile! That is the Dupont place over here."

Hardy glanced at the large double cabin a hundred yards off to the right of the road. The broad front porch gave it a homelike appearance. The two cabins before him were very small. Beyond them stood the big agency warehouse. Its overhanging upper story showed that it had been built for use as a blockhouse, but the many windows had rendered it less defensible than one of the cabins. The only persons in sight were the two Indian police who had been left in charge by Redbear.

"Well?" repeated Vandervyn.

"Not an easy place to defend," said Hardy. "Where is the office and the guardhouse?"

"The office is in the rear front corner of the warehouse. The police quarters are in the other end. You see the white tepees over there across the creek? Most of the relations of the police camp near the agency. This first cabin is Nogen's—yours, I should say. The second is mine."

"Your quarters? May I ask you for a bite of lunch as soon as I have rubbed down my mare?"

"I board with the Duponts, but I can scare up a cold lunch," said Vandervyn.

As they dismounted, Redbear came up and successfully carried favor with the new agent by offering to curry his mare. He led her away to the low brush stable beyond the warehouse.

After lunch, though still weary from his long ride, Hardy put in the rest of the day inspecting the agency property and examining the accounts of the two clerks. With the exception of two or three small items on Redbear's books, everything checked accurately.

Vandervyn brought bacon, coffee, crackers and canned food, and the new agent cooked supper with the skill of an old campaigner. After they had eaten, the chief clerk produced cigars in anticipation of a social evening. But Hardy was so drowsy that he asked to be excused. The moment he was alone, he laid his rifle and automatic pistol in the bunk, blew out the candle, and tumbled in on his blankets, without

troubling to close either the door or the one small window.

The next morning Hardy and Vandervyn were seated in the agency office when Redbear came in and started to shuffle around to his desk, on the other side of the office partition.

"Wait!" said Hardy. "I wish the chiefs and headmen of the tribe summoned to meet me in council as soon as possible."

"It is a day's ride to the camps farthest back in the mountains," remarked Vandervyn.

Hardy considered, and looked up at Redbear.

"Does not this tribe use smoke signals?"

"Not for a long time, not since I was a boy, sir. I never learned how to do it."

"That old sergeant of police will know," predicted Hardy. "Come!"

Vandervyn lingered behind the others, and followed them only to the rear corner of the warehouse. When he had seen them ride off across Sioux creek towards the highest of the mountains that encircled the valley, he went back into the office, opened the safe, and carefully sorted over its contents. All letters addressed to the late agent and to himself he took out and locked in his desk.

Meantime Hardy and Redbear with the police sergeant passed through the camp of the families of the police, where they added two old bucks to their party. A pony trail led up through the pines on the mountainside to the bare granite crag of the summit. Mid-afternoon found the Indians standing around a greenwood fire, alternately covering it with a blanket and permitting puffs of the dense smoke to rise in the still air.

In less than half an hour Hardy's glasses showed him an answering smoke on a peak fifteen or twenty miles distant. When he called attention to it, the police sergeant pointed out still another smoke signal off to the left of the first and several miles farther away. The old bucks turned from the fire and started down to where the mare and ponies had been left.

"The chiefs will come tomorrow," Redbear interpreted their answer to Hardy's inquiry.

The faded buckboard ponies were tugging their load up the slope of the terrace when Hardy came down the line of agency buildings at a gallop. Marie Dupont was driving; but on the seat beside her was a brown-eyed, olive-skinned girl, who averted her handsome face with childish shyness as Hardy wheeled his mare and reined up alongside.

Marie flushed under the officer's direct gaze, though, unlike her companion, she did not seek to avoid it. He raised his hat with punctilious politeness. She bowed, and gazing back at him with a level glance, quietly remarked: "Good afternoon, Captain Hardy. I have brought your luggage."

"That was very kind of you," said Hardy as he glanced at the other girl.

Marie smiled in instant appreciation of the fact that he had spoken to her as to an equal. She put her companion's work-reddened hand with her gloved fingers. "This is Charlie Redbear's sister Omma. They did not treat her well at school, so she ran away to come home. I want her to live with me; but she says she must be with her brother. You will not send her back?"

The young girl looked at the new agent with a smile of timid appeal, and as quickly drooped her head in bashful embarrassment. Hardy's gaze softened, and he answered reassuringly: "Redbear spoke of his sister. It will be all right."

"You are most kind to say it," approved Marie with the condescension of a gracious young queen. "Captain Hardy, we shall expect you to dine with us this evening. I shall send over your luggage in a few minutes. You need not dress for dinner."

CHAPTER IV.

The First Card.

As Hardy was unpacking his scant wardrobe, an Indian boy came to the door, thrust in his head and announced gurglingly:

"Mree him say you come six."

Hardy nodded to the boy and signed him to go. Ten minutes later he stepped up on the porch of the Dupont house. Before he could knock, Dupont stepped from the rear door of his trade store, which faced away from the porch.

"Hello, Cap!" he greeted the guest with bluff cordiality. "Glad to see you. Walk right in."

Hardy crossed the threshold and paused. The floor was covered to resemble waxed hardwood. The oriental rugs were real. The walls were papered with a quiet tapestry pattern. The adobe fireplace was set with a modern grate and faced with a tile mantel. The few pictures were well chosen. There was no sign of the guns, skins and Navajo blankets that Hardy had expected to see.

Vandervyn, sitting in an easy chair beside the small, well-filled bookcase,

looked up and smiled in boyish enjoyment of the new agent's surprise.

Dupont grunted apologetically: "Don't think I'm plumb crazy. It's all Marie— Said she couldn't live here unless she had things just like in Ottawa. Cried till I had to give in."

"Don't you let him con you, captain," chuckled Vandervyn. "It was Jake who went because Marie sent off the mail order and he had to foot the bills."

"Well, anyway, there wasn't nobody she could hire to do the work, and I had to go out on roundup." Dupont sought to cover his discomfiture. "She set to and done it all her own self. I didn't have to pay a cent for that. Sit down, Cap. Make yourself at home. Hey, Marie! you there? Here's Cap Hardy. Bring in that bottle me and Mr. Van was sampling, will you?"

Hardy picked the stiffest chair in the room, sat down—and promptly rose to a position of polite attention. A young lady had appeared in the doorway at the side of the room—a young lady in a semicollared gown, of lines irreproachable, the creamy whiteness of her full, round throat displayed. Her mass of coal-black hair was dressed in the very latest mode. Her cheeks were as highly colored as if rouged.

Vandervyn gazed at her with the brand of admiration that passes over the footlights from the first-row seats to the prettiest girl in the chorus. Hardy bowed as he would have saluted his colonel's lady or the daughter of a Moro chief, if either had been his hostess.

The girl's eyes sparkled as she noted his change of dress, his immaculate linen, and clean-shaven chin. His bow was a smile that may have been due either to gratified vanity or to a commendable self-respect. She greeted him in a tone that caused Vandervyn to straighten in his chair. "It is a great pleasure to have you dine with us."

"The pleasure is mine, Miss Dupont," declared Hardy.

"You've hit it, Cap," put in Dupont. "You can just let your bottom dollar on it you won't kick yourself for coming when you got to her foot-tongue."

The girl's sable-black eyes dilated and her perfectly molded chin rose a fraction of an inch. She placed the tray on a tea table, bowed comely, and left the room. Vandervyn looked at Hardy with an amused smile. The silent mockery was wasted. Hardy was watching Dupont uncock the whisky bottle.

"See moment, Mr. Dupont," he said. "As you are my host, the question is an awkward one to ask—yet is there not a law or a rule of the Indian bureau against bringing liquor upon a reservation?"

Dupont stared around at the inquirer in blank surprise. Before he could find words to answer, Vandervyn replied for him: "According to the strict letter of the law, captain, you are right. You can't fancy that Jake would be fool enough to sell liquor to the Indians."

"By Gar, you bet I don't—not when it's ten-year-old rye," qualified Dupont. "You can't get no better stuff out of Canada. Marie made me buy some wine, too, to celebrate your coming. She said it was up to us to loosen up, seeing as you had shook off them bucks."

"Ah, since you put it that way," Hardy accepted the explanation. "I must ask you, however, not to bring anything more of the kind across the river."

"Of course he will not, if you object," assured Vandervyn. "Nogen didn't read the law as you do; but if



"The Chiefs Will Come Tomorrow," Interpreted Redbear.

you believe in dry weather for ourselves as well as for the Indians, you're the boss."

"Sure, and here's one all round to show there ain't no hard feeling," said Dupont.

He poured out three drinks, each measured to the brim of a whisky glass. His own and Vandervyn's disappeared at a gulp. Hardy took a sip, and asked for a seltzer. The bottle was handed around another time and found him not yet finished with his first drink. But Dupont had already

begun to mellow and was in gay mood. "Here's to your boiled shirt, Cap," he toasted.

"Stand-up collar and a white shirt. It's sure a high-toned celebration. Better wear 'em careful. You'll have to mail 'em a hundred miles to the nearest Chinaman when they git dirty."

"Cheaper to throw them away, and send a mail order to Chicago for new ones," put in Vandervyn. He added, as he adjusted the fashionable tie that was hardly in keeping with his gray flannel shirt: "But you'll soon take to the local styles."

Marie again appeared in the doorway. She bowed to the guests with impressive formality.

"If you will enter, gentlemen."

Hardy went in between Vandervyn and Dupont. He avoided the girl's proud gaze by looking about at the dining room. It was as cluttered as the parlor and no less tasteful. The small



"If You Will Enter, Gentlemen," oval table was spread with a cloth of snowy French damask. The silver was real antique ware. The unassuming hostess bowed Hardy to the seat of honor.

"This here layout is Marie's," explained Dupont. "She was bound to turn herself loose to even up on what happened at the river yesterday. Nogen's figure on us dishing up the same ration regular."

"I have got to learn whether I am to have the pleasure of boarding with Miss Dupont," remarked Hardy.

"You sure have, if you're ready to shell out for it. Grub comes high here."

"And Marie is a real chef," added Vandervyn.

Hardy waited until the Indian boy had served the soup. At last he succeeded in fixing the cool gaze of his hostess. "Please do not consider that hospitality requires you to do me the favor, Miss Dupont," he said. "I do not wish to intrude, highly as I should appreciate—"

The deference of his manner soothed the girl's wounded pride. She smiled, and combined a friendly response with a side thrust at her father:

"Indeed, we shall be delighted to have you, Captain Hardy—I because of your company, and Pete because of the cash."

"By Gar, he won't git no better feed in no hotel," vowed Dupont.

"I can foresee that," agreed Hardy.

His faith was justified by each successive course. Though all the vegetables had come out of cans, they were prepared with consummate skill. The trout were fresh from the creek; the grouse and beef had been hung exactly the right length of time in the Dupont larder; the champagne was frappe. Between the girl's vivid beauty, the good cheer, and the cordiality of his companions, his usually half-sad and wholly severe expression had given place to genial animation.

Upon the return of the hostess from one of her visits to the kitchen he spoke to her in a tone that drew a stare of open resentment from Vandervyn: "You are wonderful, Miss Dupont, wonderful! One day in an Indian attack, followed by a fifty-mile drive; the next, fifty miles back, and such a dinner as this!"

"First the great-granddaughter of Sitting Bull, then la bonne cuisinière Française," flashed back the girl. "Where is the wonder? Two streaks of heredity, plus childhood in the saddle and a course in domestic science."

"Yet you must be fatigued."

"When I have done what I set out to do, then I permit myself to consider whether I need rest. There was a time when my red ancestors had no horses. They ran down their game afoot."

"You will always ride—or drive," bantered Vandervyn.

"By Gar, she won't never be driven," declared Dupont with conviction.

Vandervyn smiled over his champagne glass. He did not notice that Marie was looking at him. But Hardy was watching her. He saw her proud face soften and her brilliant eyes melt with tender passion. A moment later she was rallying him for his seriousness, and her animation soon compelled him to forget what he had seen. Vandervyn had not been mistaken in his assertion that she could set the lady to perfection when she chose. Though the cigars proved to be Havana's, they were brought in much sooner than suited Hardy.

Do you believe that Marie and Captain Hardy will become really good friends? Will he get her influence for his purposes in dealing with the dissatisfied Indians?

(TO BE CONTINUED)